



San Diego City Attorney **CASEY GWINN**

NEWS RELEASE

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STING TARGETS LIMOUSINE DRIVERS WITHOUT VALID PERMITS AND INSURANCE CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, POLICE DEPARTMENT, HARBOR POLICE, AND PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION JOIN FORCES

San Diego, CA: This morning in downtown San Diego, an undercover operation netted 7 illegal limousine operators. The operators violated state law by failing to have a license with the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and failing to have proper insurance. The passenger carrier industry too has complained about the illegal operators.

"Grads, brides, horse racing fans, and concertgoers all hire limousines for convenience and safety," said City Attorney Casey Gwinn. "Unfortunately, some limousine operators are not as safe as consumers may think. With undercover operations such as this, we better protect both consumers and legitimate business operators."

According to Sgt. George Youkhanna of the San Diego Police Department, the sting was conducted at three downtown locations: Civic Center Plaza at 1200 Third Avenue, Bank of America at 450 B Street and 1100 First Avenue. Targeted limo drivers were called to one of the three locations at different times this morning. When they arrived, the undercover investigator who had previously called the illegal limo operator for a ride approached the driver. The undercover investigator confirmed the details of the pick-up with the driver. Then, San Diego Police stepped-in and cited the limo operator.

The driver and owner of the following company was arrested today and the limousine impounded: Kaye Bolin of Capitol Limousine Service. The drivers and/or operators of the following companies were cited today: Limos by Linda, Masterpiece Limousine, RC Limo, and Black Tie Limo. The following owners will receive notify warrant complaints: Limousine Central HQ and Russo and Bellagio's Limousine.

The San Diego City Attorney's Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit, the San Diego Police Department's Traffic Division, the Harbor Police, and the PUC were partners in today's undercover operation. Sergeant George Youkhanna of the San Diego Police Department supervised the operation.

Passenger carriers, including limousines, airport shuttles, charter and scheduled bus operators, obtain permits or certificates from the PUC after providing proof of liability insurance (or other means of financial responsibility) and safety information. The permit fee is \$500 and a statewide certificate is available for \$1500. Buses are inspected and approved by the California Highway Patrol.

(MORE)

Brian Polte, the President of the San Diego Limousine Association, was emphatic: “The days of the renegade operators are over. The unfair competition has nickel and dime'd the legal operators long enough. We are actively seeking to stop the unfair competition and promote legal, safe, and secure companies operating in the City of San Diego.”

According to Deputy City Attorney Kathryn Lange, who has prosecuted these types of cases over the past five years and who organized the sting operation, stated that there may be almost as many illegal operators as legal operators, since all it takes is a driver, a car, and an advertisement to start a business. According to Lange, these misdemeanor violations of state law Public Utilities Code, Section 5411 are punishable by three months in custody and a \$1,000 fine.

Industry representatives and the Commission agree that safety is a major concern. Illegal operators don't necessarily screen their drivers properly; they don't carry the proper liability insurance for their passengers; and often they don't maintain workers compensation insurance for their drivers.

Richard Clark, Director of the Consumer Protection and Safety Division of the PUC, stated, “The Commission is happy for this opportunity to work with the City Attorney, local law enforcement, and the industry. This [sting] is the perfect example of governmental agencies working together with industry to stop unsafe and unfair competition.”

The City Attorney's Office advises consumers to check out a limousine company before taking a ride. All advertisements for passenger carriers must provide the “TCP” license number. With the “TCP” number in hand, consumers can call the Commission at 1-800-877-8867 and find out the license status of a transportation provider, insurance information, and vehicle ownership information. A recent check of local advertising and telephone books found at least sixty companies advertising without providing a permit number. Deputy City Attorney Lange notes, “As a follow-up to getting the illegal operators off the road, we will be tackling the advertising problems.”

Consumers that are aware of an illegal operator may file a complaint with the PUC by calling 1-800-894-9444. For more information about the San Diego City Attorney's Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit, visit www.sandiegocityattorney.org

Other contact numbers: Brian Polte, President, San Diego Limousine Association, 877-283-6300. Licensing Division of the Public Utilities Commission, 415-703-2063.

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